

# Native Orchids

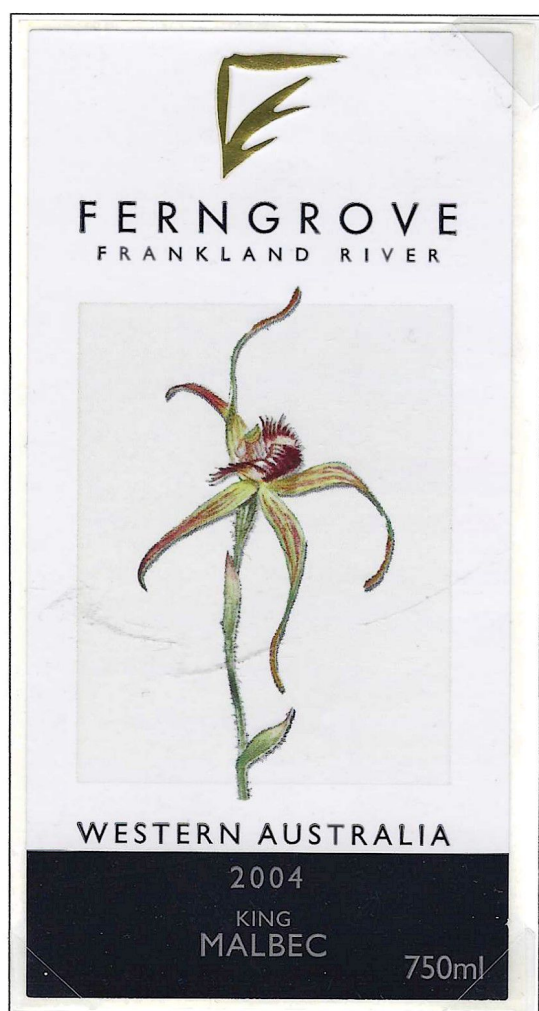


Small and white Clean and bright You look happy to meet me.

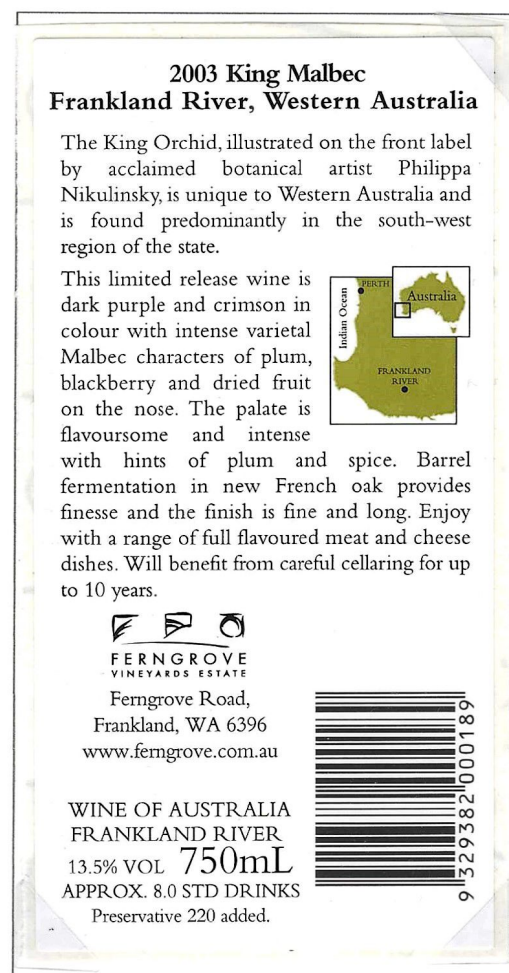


Not edelweiss but our Australian native orchids that besot a small dedicated group of enthusiasts who go to great lengths seeking them out. In Australia they are widely distributed but more prolific in the wetter coastal fringe of this continent. One may be required to travel many thousands of kilometres to view a single blooming specimen. This is the story of a whirlwind tour visiting three different states during Spring in order to view some truly magnificent native orchids.

Scope. A range of postcards from undivided backs and hand painted have been used along with the more readily available modern era postcards to illustrate the story.



Ferngrove wine label for Malbec wine showing the King spider orchid (*Caladenia pectinate*). Designer, the acclaimed botanical artist Philippa Nikulmsky.



★ Identifies a rare or scarce item (Based on the number of times that item has been seen over 40 years of collecting)

## Bibliography:

- Playles 'Real Photo Stamp Boxes' - - How to Identify and Date Real Photo Vintage Postcards [www.playle.com/realphoto/photoa.php](http://www.playle.com/realphoto/photoa.php)  
David Cook 'Picture Postcards in Australia 1898-1920' Pioneer Design Studio Victoria 1986  
Jones, David 'A Complete Guide to Native Orchids of Australia' Reed New Holland Publishers 2nd Ed 2006

With indiscriminate land clearing since European settlement there is no way of knowing what we may have lost with regard to undiscovered and undescribed species. Large tracts of land were clear-felled for farming, a practice that still goes on to this day. Many terrestrial have evolved to such an extent that their habitat requirements have become very specific. Generally well drained light sandy or granite soils best suit most terrestrial orchids. Orchids have also evolved to 'die back' in late Spring and early Summer as an adaptation to the hot dry summers. They sustain their growth by having a tuber deep in the soil to store carbohydrates in readiness for Autumn re-emergence and then Spring flowering.

**Bringing in the Bush Hay. Western Australia**



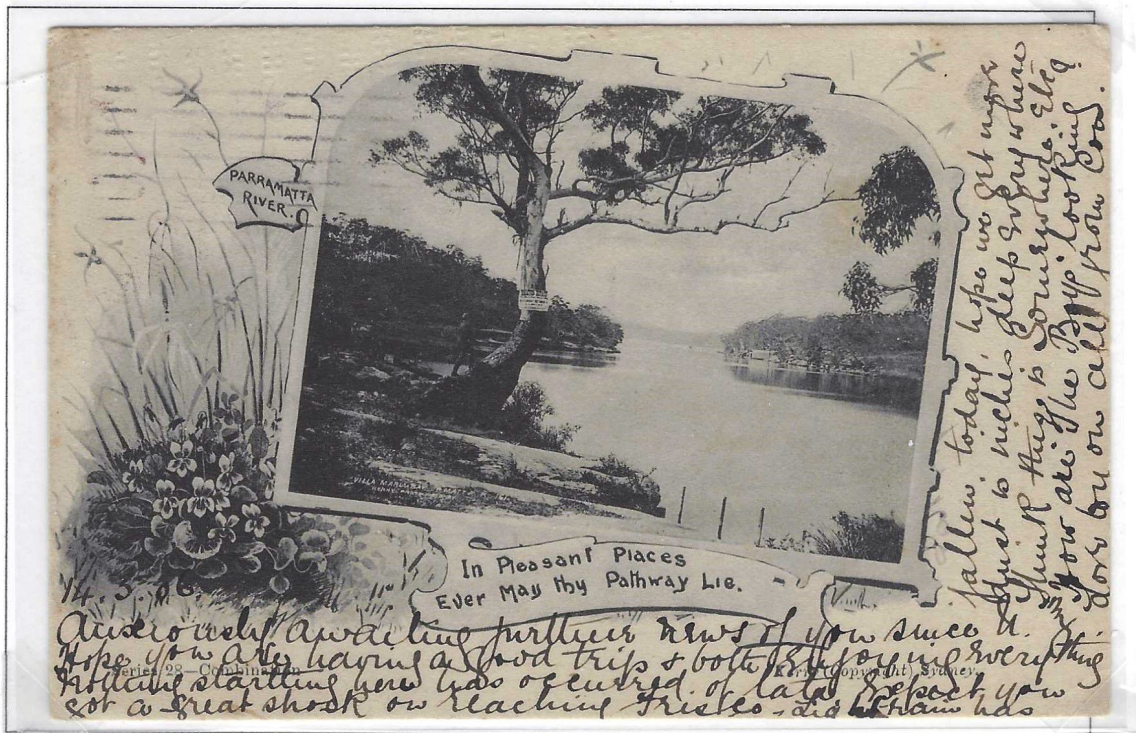
Art nouveau stylised *Caladenia* or 'spider orchids'

✦ Lithograph Real photograph by 'Western Mail' Perth WA Undivided back Card by Stanway Trapp Circa 1900

Most of the terrestrial orchids are very localized in habitat. Quite a few are endemic to a particular State while some are endemic to a very small pocket of bushland. The lightly forested regions of the Parramatta River once had an abundance of 'spider orchids', but urban development has led to their demise. Some becoming extinct.

**Parramatta River**

*Caladenia* or 'spider orchids'



✦ Collotype postcard Centre Photograph Charles Kerry Sydney Posted NSW to Chicago 1906



Chromolithograph Artist James Craig  
Austral Series Postmarked Fremantle 30 Dec 1906

After our flight into West Australia we join countless like minded enthusiasts. We are striking out in a south easterly direction to Brookton and then to Boyagin Nature Reserve near Pengelly, Western Australia. It is early Spring and already the forest floor is carpeted with wildflowers. Driving along we spotted dozens of 'donkey orchids', as we call any of these orchids in the genus *Diuris*. Hopping out of our car we go across to examine these yellow and brown species whose petal's shape, resemble donkey ears.

← Donkey orchids

Dancing spider orchids

Blue fairy orchids



Fossicking around the bush our eyes spotted the *Caladenia discoidea* or the 'dancing spider orchid'. Even the most gentle of breezes make the flowers dance on their slender stems.

As if competing for our attention we spotted *Pheladenia deformis* or the 'blue fairy orchid' nearby.



Elephant ears orchid

Our next destination is the area around Kulin and Jilakin Rock. A portion of this area had had a fire the previous summer and there in abundance was *Pyrorchis nigricans*, sometimes called 'elephant ears' because of the very large fleshy leaves at its base. This orchid flowers in profusion after a bush fire has been through, therefore the genus name *Pyrorchis*.

Greenhood orchids (*Plumatichilos*—with feathery appendages and *Urochilus*)

In the areas untouched by fire we found a species of *Urochilus* and *Plumatichilos*, both previously within the genus *Pterostylis* and commonly referred to as 'greenhoods'. The dainty green helmet shaped flowers often conjure up images little elves among the abundance of the showy yellow *Caladenia flava*.

Cowslip orchid

Chromolithograph Artist Stanway Tapp  
Published by Bon Marche Stores Perth Circa 1910

Cowslip orchid

*Caladenia flava* is commonly referred to as the 'cowslip orchid' because it resembles the yellow of the 'cowslip primrose' *Primula veris*, common to much of Europe. *Primula* are often found in slippery boggy ground.

The orchid has a wide distribution and can vary greatly with the amount of red markings. Once again, an orchid that flowers in profusion following a bush fire.



Chromolithograph Real photograph Published by Wildlife Sound Studio Balingup Circa 1980



Real photograph Chromolithograph Circa 2000  
Printed by Mercantile Press O'Connor Fremantle

The next hotspot was the Stirling Range National Park where we planned to spend a couple of days.

One particular species we had come to find on the roadside out from Mt Trio, was *Thelymitra variegata* or the 'Queen of Sheba'. Our third attempt to find this orchid! A rare orchid only opening on very warm sunny days and then flowering for a short period. It was worth the trip just to discover this very attractive elusive species. The fanciful common name, "Queen of Sheba", attempts to portray its beauty and magnificence.

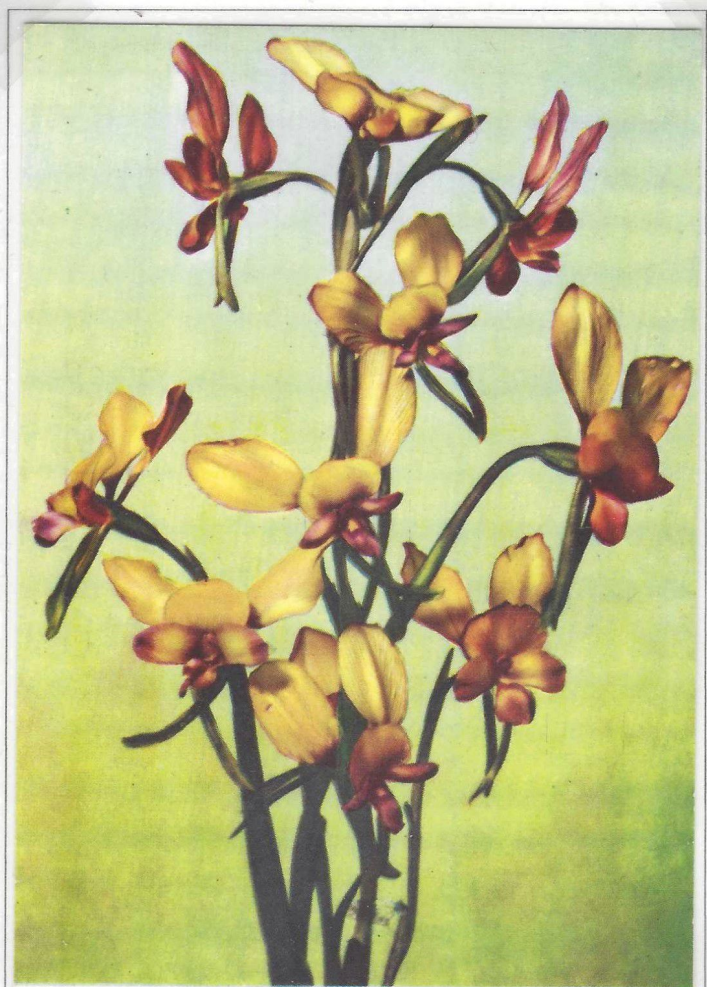
Queen of Sheba

Custard orchid



Near by we spotted *Thelymitra villosa* or the 'custard orchid'. This orchid can be easily identified when not in flower, as it is the only *Thelymitra* with a hairy leaves. It does not take a lot of imagination as to the derivation of the common name. The weather being bright and sunny, we had no difficulty spotting these vibrantly coloured gems of the bush.

Real photograph Chromolithograph Circa 1976  
Published by Westviews Production



West Australian Wildflower series PC 4 - 9  
 "DONKEY ORCHID" (Diuris longifolia)  
 A charming and beautiful ground orchid

Chromolithograph colour photograph  
 Produced by Westviews production

Always treading warily as we don't wish to meet Mr 'Joe Blake', our next find at this location was *Caladenia footeana* or the 'Crimson spider orchid'. Named in honour of Herb Foote, foundation president of the West Australian Native Orchid Study Group. Often growing in small clumps along the western edge of the wheatbelt between Cranbrook and Northampton.

One of the things we have discovered, that in Western Australia, when searching for orchids, is that a few kilometres down the road, one is likely to find different species. This being the case in point when spotting some *Diuris longifolia*, collectively referred to as 'donkey orchids', only a few metre from the side of the road. The name *longifolia* refers to the long (*longus* L) and leaf (*folium* L). As they tend to grow in clumps reaching up to 350mm in height the orchids appear to be saying 'photograph me', 'photograph me'. This orchid was discovered in the Paper Collar Creek area, as we were driving back to 'The Retreat' at the end of the day.

Purple pansy orchid.  
 Part of the 'Donkey orchid' group

Crimson spider orchid



Chromolithograph colour photograph  
 Produced by Dynamic Print Bunbury Photograph by V Holly



Chromolithograph colour photograph  
 Printed for Kojunup Tourist Committee by  
 Dynamic Print Bunbury WA Photograph by V Holly

Not far from the 'rabbit orchid' we found a clump of 'pink fairies', *Caladenia latifolia*. Now we know why the likes of children's book authors and illustrators May Gibbs and Ida Outhwaite were inspired to depict these tiny gems in their book illustrations.

This orchid readily hybridises with the previously illustrated yellow 'cowslip orchid' to create some vibrantly coloured red and yellow orchids. This orchid can be identified when not in flower by the large green leaf which is also green on the underside.

The next day we drove towards Chester Pass Road stopping at Red Gum Creek, a lightly scrubbed area. Upon alighting from our vehicle it was only minutes before a shout of glee as we both bent to inspect a veritable carpet of orchids, a very good year! Yes it was the 'rabbit orchid' or botanically more correct *Leptoceras menzii*. This orchid was named for Archibald Menzies, the first European to make collections of West Australian native orchids. The two petals standing erect conjure an image of a rabbit on the alert to our presence.

Rabbit orchid

Pink fairy orchid



Chromolithograph colour photograph  
 Produced by Emu Souvenirs P/Ltd Photographer F Indrisie



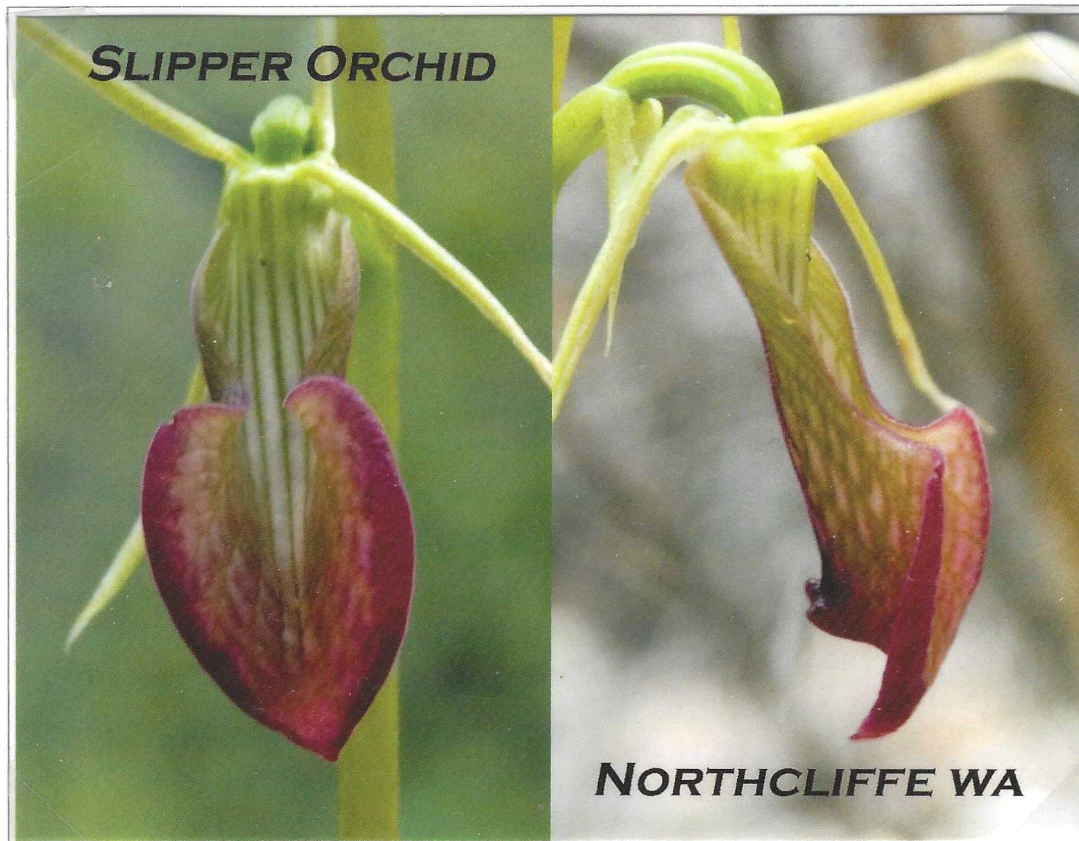
King spider orchid

After two days at Stirling National Park the next destination was Mt Frankland National Park. One of the first orchids we discovered was a fine specimen of *Caladenia pectinata* or the 'King spider orchid' This was the orchid used on the label of the King Malbec wine we were after, at the nearby winery, Ferngrove. (their premium wine's label show case many orchids from the National Park refer to title page.) Derivation of the latin name is from *pectinis* or comb. This is a large showy orchid thereby giving the common name of 'King' but the prominent labellum fringes adds to its majesty. Its stronghold is in the southwestern corner of Western Australia in the seasonally wetter areas.

Slipper orchid

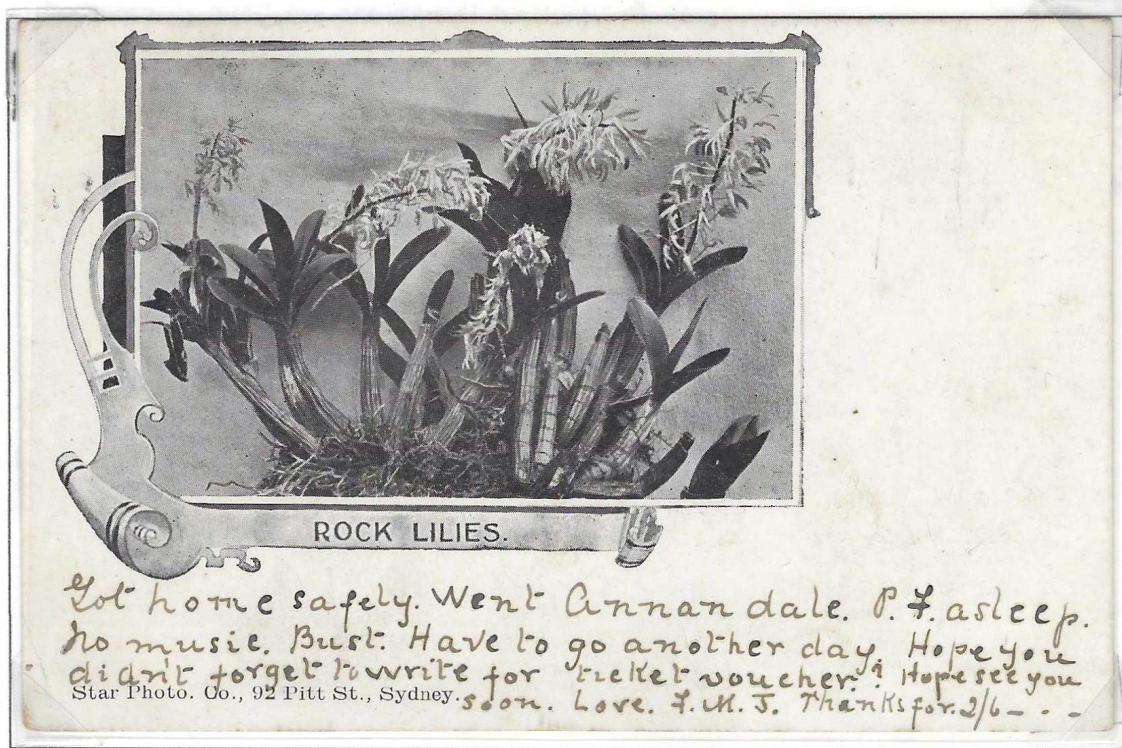
Chromolithograph colour photograph  
 Printed by Mercantile Press  
 O'Connor Fremantle

Next, we headed down to the south coast and near Denmark we were told of a *Cryptostylis ovata*, 'slipper orchid', growing in the fork of a tree. And we saw it! Lucky to find such an early flowering as it's habitat is coastal heaths and swamp margins. Obviously enough detritus collects to sustain the pseudobulbs-with sufficient/frequent mists. It was collected for the first time near Albany in 1801. Endemic to south western West Australia.



Chromolithograph colour photograph Photographed by Cheryl Macaulay





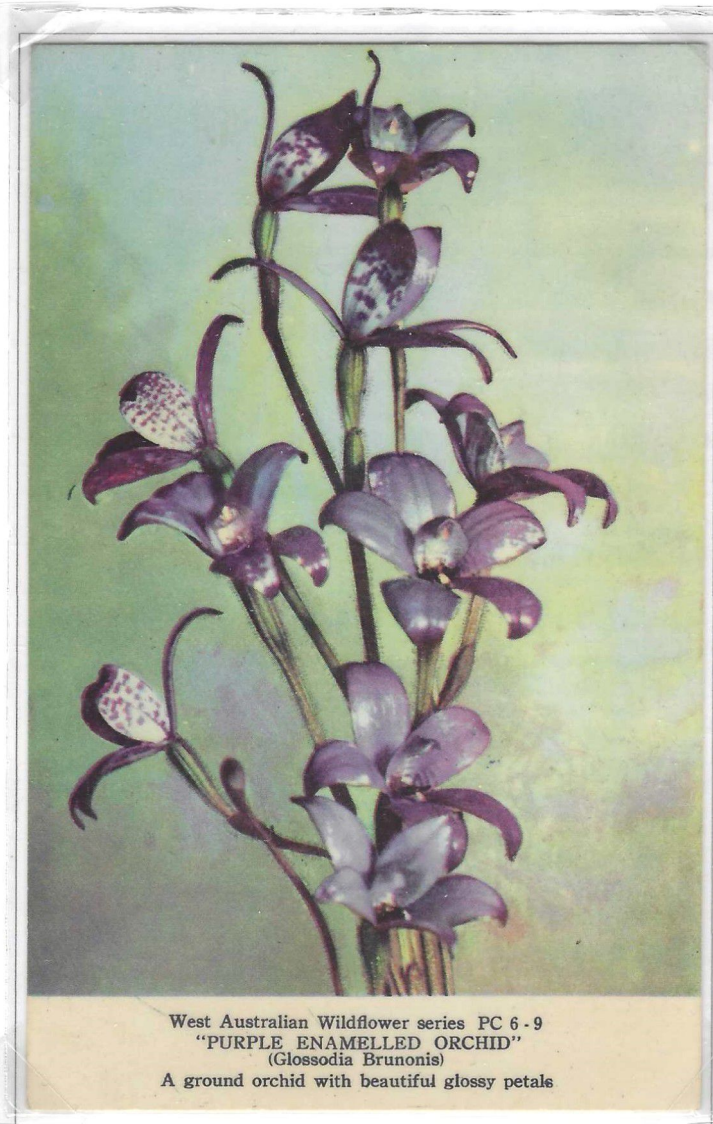
✦ Undivided back Lithograph. Photographed by W Livermore Lithograph Publisher Star Photo Co Sydney Posted Oct 1900

There are many varieties of this *Thelychiton speciosus* and we have found the most common to this area, *Thelychiton speciosus* var *hilli*. With its white to creamy raceme of flowers it is easily spotted. The plants are lithophytes which means they grow on rocks and draw their nutrients from the detritus that washes down over the rocks. The thick leathery leaves and tough ribbed pseudobulbs make this a tough sturdy orchid and impervious to almost all insect attacks.

The plants can grow to several metres across and in a good flowering year make a spectacular display lasting several weeks. This orchid is highly perfumed which can help locate its presence.



✦ Real photograph Kodak Austral paper Published unknown Circa 1910



West Australian Wildflower series PC 6-9  
 "PURPLE ENAMELLED ORCHID"  
 (Glossodia Brunonis)  
 A ground orchid with beautiful glossy petals

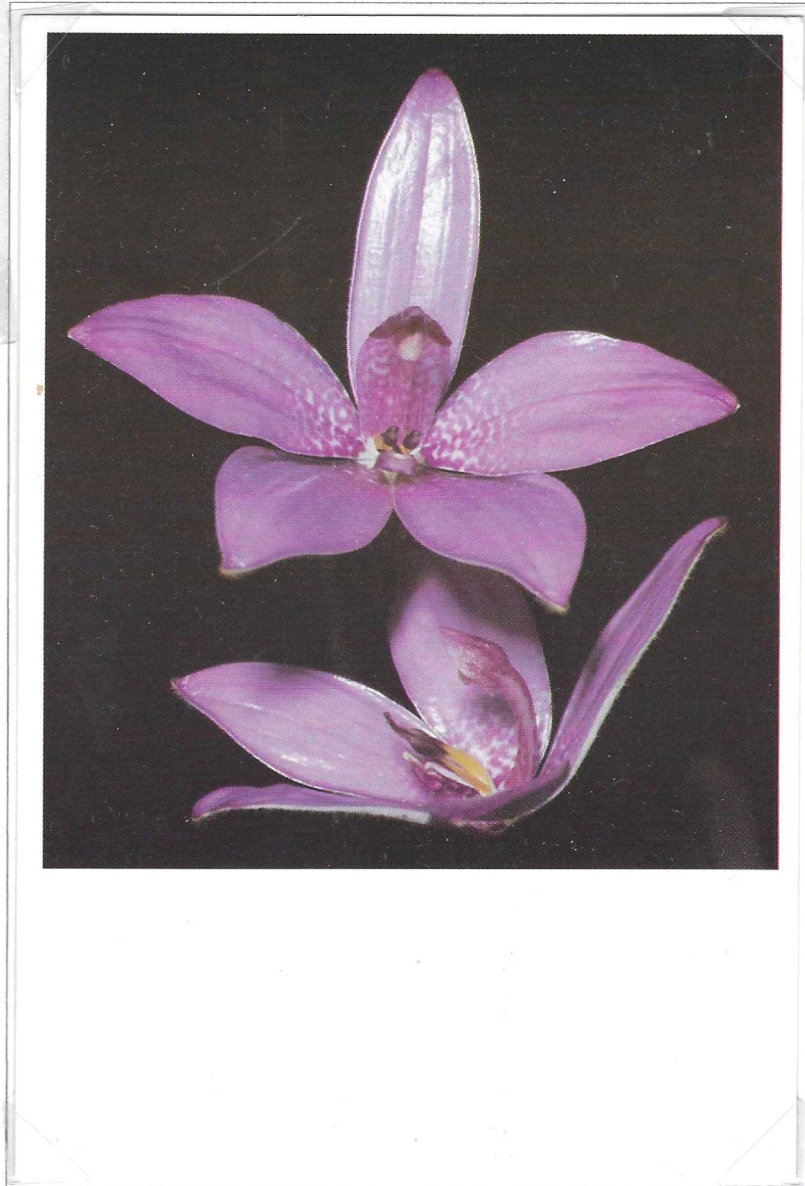
Chromolithograph colour photograph.  
 Published by Westviews Production Circa 1960

*Elythranthera emarginata* or the 'pink enamel orchid' is shorter in stature than its cousin the 'purple enamel orchid' but both orchids are easily identified by their very shiny appearance. As it is still September we were lucky to find this orchid as it usually does not commence flowering until October.

Imagine our surprise as we walked along the South Retreat boundary inside the National Park, following the trail set up for walkers, to also discover not one but two species of the 'purple enamel orchid' The purple species is known as *Elythranthera brunonis* after the famous botanist Robert Brown, who sailed with Mathew Flinders to Australia. This orchid can be confused with *Elythranthera emarginata* but for the labellum folding up and back.

Purple enamel orchid

Pink enamel orchid



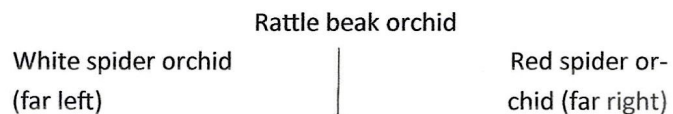
Chromolithograph colour photograph Produced by Australian  
 Maximum Cards Printed by Fibre Containers Ltd 1985



Chromolithograph Painting by Alison M Ashby  
 Printed by Govt Printer Adelaide South Australia 1979

The following day saw us on our way back up the coast towards Bussleton and then Perth. Stopping at a likely looking spot just south of Bussleton we immediately discovered a colony of *Caladenia longicauda* or the 'White spider orchid'. The name is derived from the long tail like sepals which can attain a length up to 150mm on the 300 to 600mm tall stems. These orchids prefer *Banksia-Eucalyptus marginata* woodland. There are many subspecies in this group thereby making a positive identification difficult.

White spider orchid



This site proved particularly rich with orchids as we found in addition *Cynaicula gemmate* or the 'blue china orchid', *Lyperanthus serratus*, common name 'rattle beak orchid' and *Caladenia discoidea* or the 'dancing spider orchid'.

Common names are often easily understood as blue china was very popular in Europe during the 19th century and this orchid is evocative of the colour used. The 'rattle beak orchid' has a distinct rattle sound when shaken and the 'dancing spider orchid' looks every bit like a spider on a string, popular at show grounds and fairs. Our stop almost had us missing our plane, -orchids are such a distraction to the besotted!



Dancing spider orchid (centre)

Blue china orchid

Hand coloured lithograph Artist Percy Stanway Tapp Perth W A  
 Published by Bon Marche Stores Perth

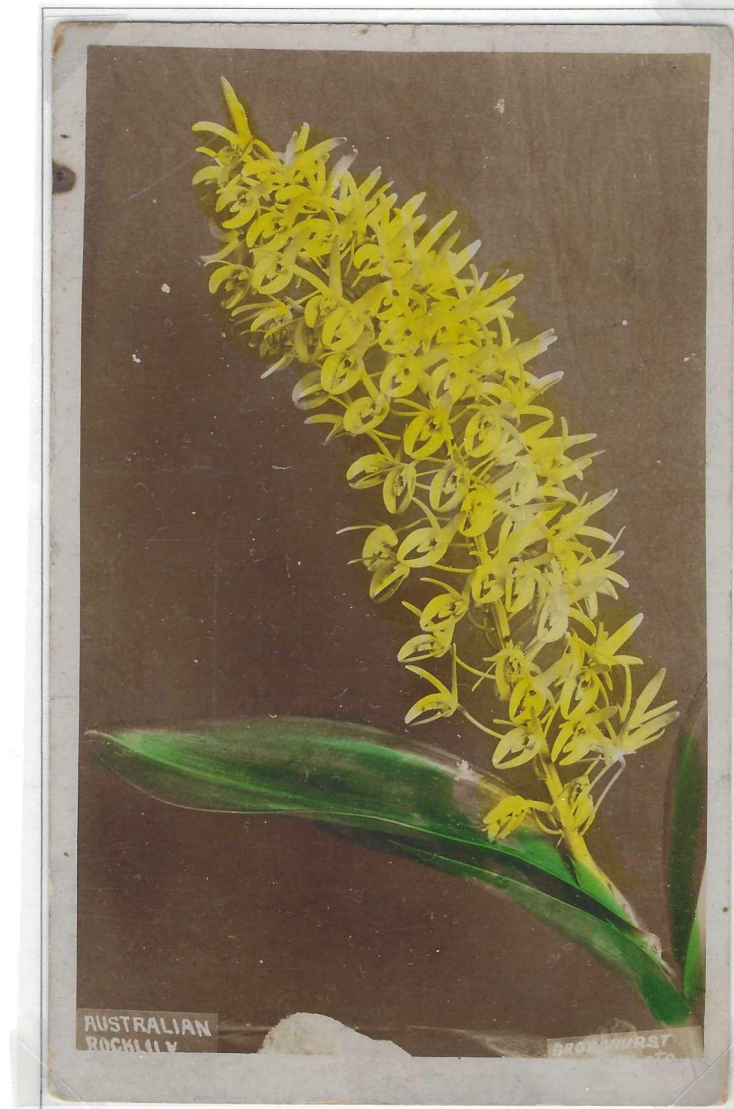


★ Real photograph Publisher and photographer unknown  
postally used 20 Feb 1907

After landing in Sydney we are soon on our way up the coast and slightly inland in another hire car to the area near Dungog to access the Barrington Tops National Park. We had heard of an orchid flowering here that we had not seen in the 'wild'. We hoped to find *Thelychiton speciosus*, formerly known as *Dendrobium speciosum*. Venturing along one of the many popular tracks we soon find the orchid on a rock outcrop. The other place to see *Thelychiton speciosus* is perched on trees. But whichever location, they are always up high seeking out the sunlight.

Sydney rock orchid or Australian rock lily.  
*Thelychiton speciosus*

This orchid is particularly hardy and is known as the 'Sydney Rock Orchid' because of the abundance in the areas surrounding Sydney in the 19th century. Over time, urban expansion and illegal collecting has led to its demise.



★ Real photograph Colour tinted Publisher Broadhurst  
Post cards Ashfield NSW Circa 1910

*Caladenia  
carnea*

*Diuris*  
species

*Glossodia  
major*



*Real photograph (centre) Hand coloured Chromolithograph  
Publisher unknown Circa 1900. Australia Day also known as Anniversary Day in NSW up until 1935*

Still in the Dungog region, we found *Glossodia major*, common name 'Parson in the pulpit', *Caladenia carnea*, sometimes referred to as 'pink fingers' and the 'donkey orchid' or *Diuris*. The common name for *Glossodia major* comes from the white throat of the labellum resembling a parson's collar. All three were found in open woodland forest, in low numbers an indication that rainfall has been less than usual. Although common orchids, it is a great reminder of the bountiful diversity of colour and orchid forms to be found.

Further along the track we discovered *Dockrilla teretifolia*, commonly referred to as a 'rats tail' or 'thin pencil' orchid due to the long, round thin leaves. When it flowers well the mass of hanging blooms give the appearance of a bridal veil, another common name. It is strongly perfumed so we knew it was nearby.

Rats tail, thin pencil or bridal veil orchid



*Real photograph by A G Heaton Publisher unknown Circa 1910*



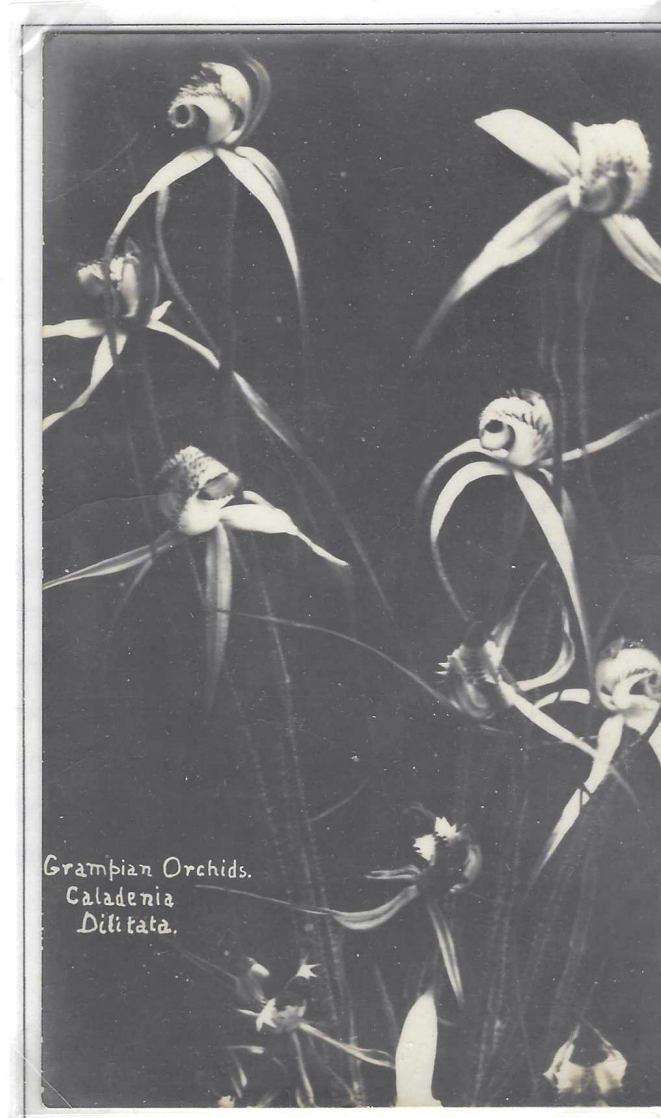
Chromolithograph Painted by Alison Ashby circa 1930  
Published by South Australian Govt Printer Dec 1977

On a rough steep track we found *Caladenia dilatata*, common name, 'green comb spider orchid'. It is easily distinguished by the large comb like fringes on the side of the labellum. A fairly widespread orchid in light forested areas. The orchid has very distinct yellow, green and red colouring and can have up to 3 flowers, each over 80mm across, thereby making it stand out among the array of Spring flowers. It is endemic to south-eastern Victoria and Tasmania.

A few days after returning home from Barrington Tops, we travelled to the Grampians in Victoria. (Caught Spirit) One of the first orchids found was a most unusual orchid, *Gastrodia sesamoides*. The name *gastroides* is for 'pot bellied' and refers to the shape of these bell like flowers. The orchid prefers moist conditions and is found in association with decaying matter. The orchid also lacks chlorophyll. The common name 'potato orchid', was given because of the shape and colour of the flower. This orchid can reach a height of 900mm in ideal damp conditions.

Potato orchid

Green comb spider orchid



Real photograph Photographer unknown  
Publisher unknown Austral Kodak card Circa 1920



Real photograph by A G Heaton  
Publisher unknown Circa 1910

Nearby a 'scented' or 'plain sun orchid', *Thelymitra nuda* was also found. The flowers simultaneously open making a spectacular display. They can vary in colour from blue to white and sometimes a pinkish colour. Found throughout south-eastern Australia. As the petals and sepals lack any adornment of stripes or dots the common name of 'plain' is very apt. Like many *Thelymitra*, the warm weather encourages the flower to emit a sweet scent to attract insect pollinators.

During our stay in the Grampians we drove to the northern area, where we had not been before. The warm sunny Spring weather facilitated the 'sun orchids' or *Thelymitra* to open and show their splendour. As the name implies, these orchid blooms open fully on warm sunny days. Their colour ranges from pink, white to various hues of blue. Blue predominates in this family, a colour not common in the orchid world. Most of these orchids are very difficult to identify unless you have a hand-lens to study the column and a good memory!

Sun orchids

Scented sun orchid



Chromolithograph Real photograph by V Holly  
Publisher Dynamic Print Bunbury



✦ Blank card Hand sketched using water colour  
 Artist unknown Publisher logo (reverse)  
 Donald Taylor Co Ltd Adelaide Circa 1905

Our next find of significance was *Caleana major*. A lovely colony growing close to eucalyptus as we always find them. One of the most iconic of all Australian terrestrial orchids, the 'flying duck orchid'.

It could be said that it is bizarre, the way it represents a duck in flight and by triggering the labellum it takes on the appearance of a cockatoo. The pseudo-copulation mechanism is usually triggered by a sawfly.

The orchid we most love to find!

And one of the reasons why we would crisscross the country to spot these elusive 'flowers' -so fickle in showing their lovely blooms to the world!

The next day we went in a different direction, (so many tracks to follow it is difficult to know which one!) but south in the Grampians. The first find of the morning was *Caladenia tentaculate* or the 'eastern mantis orchid'. The marginal teeth to the labellum can be up to 7mm length. The labellum is lightly hinged so it was lovely to see it trembling in the light breeze that was blowing.

Eastern mantis orchid

Flying duck orchid



Chromolithograph real photograph  
 Produced by Australian Maximum cards